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*a monthly bulletin
from Canadian
Hydrographic
Service*

About the monthly
Water Level bulletin

January Precipitation
Over the Great
Lakes

As a percentage of
the long-term January
average:

Great Lakes 59%
Basin

Lake Erie 63%
(including
Lake St. Clair)

Lake Superior 61%

Lakes 51%
Michigan-
Huron

Lake Ontario 75%

Note: These figures
are preliminary.

January Outflows

LEVEL news

Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Water Levels



Volume 11, Number 2

February 10, 2003

Water Levels on Middle Lakes Similar to Those in 2001

After moving closer to their long-term average levels last summer, the middle lakes-lakes Michigan-Huron, St. Clair and Erie-have fallen to the same levels as they were at the beginning of February 2001. Although specific details differ by lake, simply put, the greater than average seasonal declines experienced so far this year on the middle lakes have erased the recovery in levels noticed on them last summer.

A detailed discussion tracing changes in Lakes Michigan-Huron water levels over the past two years is provided on the back page of this month's LEVELnews.

Water levels throughout the Great Lakes are expected to continue to decline during February, although all lakes, except Lake Superior, are likely nearing the end of their annual seasonal decline. Lake Superior, the most northerly lake, generally begins its seasonal rise a month or more later than the other lakes.

Unless very wet conditions are experienced, water levels are expected to remain below average on each of the Great Lakes over the next six month and likely lower than they were during 2002. Water levels on the middles lakes will likely be similar to, or possibly lower than, those experienced during 2001. No new record lows are expected on the lakes at this time, however, near-record low levels on Lakes Michigan-Huron are possible. If wet conditions return to the basin, lakes Erie and Ontario could recover to near average levels. Lakes Superior and Michigan-Huron levels; however, would still remain below average even if high water supplies are received over the next six months. Be sure to check the Monthly Water Levels Bulletin each month for the latest 6-month water level forecast for each lake.

Great Lakes Water Level Information

Lake	January Monthly Mean Level		Beginning of February Level	
	Compared to Monthly Average (1918-2001)	Compared to One Year Ago	Compared to Beginning-of-Month Average (1918-2001)	Compared to One Year Ago
Superior	19 cm below	6 cm below	22 cm below	7 cm below

From the Great
Lakes

As a percentage of
the long-term January
average:

Lake Superior 99%

Lake Erie 93%

Lake Huron 98%

Lake Ontario 93%

Note: These figures
are preliminary.

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Summary information for
"LEVELnews"

Michigan-Huron	53 cm below	17 cm below	55 cm below	17 cm below
St. Clair	25 cm below	9 cm below	21 cm below	23 cm below
Erie	16 cm below	3 cm below	22 cm below	18 cm below
Ontario	22 cm below	23 cm below	28 cm below	30 cm below

Lakes Michigan-Huron

In the next few paragraphs we'll review, in some detail, what has happen to water levels on Lakes Michigan-Huron over the past two years to get them to where they are today; 55 cm below average, at virtually the same level as they were at the beginning of February 2001.

After declining from near-record high levels in mid-1997, at the beginning of February 2001 Lakes Michigan-Huron were about 56 cm below average. Levels on the lakes rose a bit more than average during the spring of 2001, peaking in late-June, 51 cm below their long-term average, a 5 cm improvement relative to average compared to February conditions.

After peaking, the lakes began a slow seasonal decline; however, thanks to a damp, mild fall, the 2001 seasonal decline stalled and, in fact, periodically reversed from mid-September to late-December. A dramatic shift to colder weather in late December caused increased evaporation from the lakes and levels resumed their seasonal decline during January and first three weeks of February 2002. When the lakes ended their seasonal decline on February 19th they had only declined 17 cm in total since peaking in June 2001, 11 cm less than the long-term decline average for this period of time. As a result, on February 19th the lakes were 40 cm below average, 16 cm closer to average than they were at the beginning of February 2001.

Water level conditions continued to improved during the first half of 2002. A wet spring resulted in a 43 cm seasonal rise in levels between February 19th and July 9th, when water levels peaked for the year, an increase of about 14 cm more than average. Therefore, when the daily water levels peaked in July 2002 they were still 26 cm below average, but 30 closer to average than they were at the beginning of February 2001. Most notable to recreational boaters and others was the fact that summer 2002 levels were 25 cm or more higher than they were during the summer of 2001.

Unfortunately, dry conditions since July combined with below average inflows from Lake Superior and significant evaporation from the lakes so far this fall and early winter have lead to very low water supplies to Lakes Michigan-Huron. Since peaking in July 2002, water levels have declined by 57 cm so far this year, about 29 cm more than average, effectively erasing the 30 cm recovery in levels experienced between February 2001 and July 2002.

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URL: http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/water/level-news/ln200302_e.html